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ABSTRACT

The two conference papers in this publication examine the historical origins of the subordination of women to men. In the first paper, "Unraveling the Problem of Origins: An Anthropological Search for Feminist Theory," Rayna Reiter reviews what is known and what is not known at the present time and provides a feminist critique of the gaps in our knowledge left by a male-oriented tradition of learning. She points out that modern capitalist social organization clearly depends on the continuance of a certain kind of female subordination, but it cannot be seen as solely responsible for its origins. Although more research is required, Reiter emphasizes that there is already much evidence to suggest the ways in which the establishment of the gender hierarchy is linked to other forms of power structures and is an inherent part of their development. The paper by Elaine Pagels, "When Did Man Make God in His Image? A Case Study in Religion and Politics," shows in considerable detail how the process of establishing an orthodoxy in the early Christian Church, both in terms of correct theology and in terms of how the church hierarchy and membership are to be organized, is linked intimately to the process of taking away options for women. (Author/RM)

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THE SCHOLAR AND THE FEMINIST III: THE SEARCH FOR ORIGINS

A conference sponsored by
The Barnard College Women's Center

Papers From
The Morning Session

April 10, 1976

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Hester Eisenstein
August, 1976

INTRODUCTION

Hester Eisenstein

As Elizabeth Janeway points out in her opening remarks, the power to name, to say what is important and significant, has always been an attribute of the powers-that-be. Those powers, the pronouncers of orthodoxy, have been predominantly male. Hence it is crucially important to create instrumentalities whereby the voices of women can be heard, speaking with an authority and a legitimacy of their own.

This legitimizing function is shared by the plethora of conferences and publications, growing in number, covering all aspects of the resurgent women's movement. Among these, the Barnard Women's Center conference series on *The Scholar and The Feminist* has had a unique focus, posing the double question, What does feminism bring to scholarship? And what does scholarship bring to feminism? In exploring this crucial interaction, the Barnard conferences have been a meeting place, a source of energy, an exchange of ideas, and perhaps above all, a forum, where innovative, speculative but responsible feminist scholarship can be shared and examined in a receptive atmosphere.

For the first conference, *The Scholar and The Feminist* (May 11, 1974), twelve scholars from widely differing disciplines were invited to speak about their own intellectual biographies in the context of their current research. What was the impact of feminism on their interests, their goals, and their identity as scholars? Their answers covered a wide range of opinions and experiences, from highly personal and individual accounts to universal and moving statements about the life and the work of the feminist scholar.

Hester Eisenstein, Academic Coordinator for The Scholar and The Feminist III, is Coordinator of the Experimental College at Barnard College.

At the time of the second conference, *The Scholar and The Feminist II: Toward New Criteria of Relevance* (April 12, 1975), the number of scholars who identified themselves as feminists was continuing to grow. New journals devoting themselves to feminist scholarship were springing up. It was evident that in many different disciplines, feminists were beginning to have an impact on traditional methodologies. This conference, then, spoke to the issue: What kinds of changes does feminism bring to the conduct of scholarship? The two morning speakers addressed the new kinds of questions raised by feminist scholars, the new data that feminist scholars were uncovering, the new assumptions that they were applying to old data, and the new concepts that feminist thinkers were bringing to traditional fields.

By 1976, feminist scholarship was visible, extensive, and growing. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to move onto the terrain of some broad, theoretical issue of current interest. The problem we chose was the search for origins. The title is, in the first instance, evocative: we all have the impulse to find roots, to have the sense that we are part of a tradition, that we have not, like Athena, sprung full-blown from the head of Zeus, but that we, indeed, come from somewhere. In particular, as women struggling for self-determination, we have felt the need of connections to the past. Some of the most important work in women's history has been the finding of "lost women," women of achievement in previous eras, whose existence demonstrates that indeed, we have foremothers.

The particular question, however, that we sought to answer in its historical dimension was, what are the origins of the subordination of women to men? The problem grows naturally out of the feminist conviction that the present and past position of women in society and culture has neither been ordained by a higher power, nor determined by a "natural order" of things. It must therefore be explained. Hence, the search for origins. What does the present unsatisfactory position of women stem from? How far back does it go? In what structures—psychological, social, economic, political and biological—does it have its basis?

Posed in this manner, the problem of origins can be seen as a series of further, interrelated questions. How, exactly, did the situation of women in modern society develop? Are there parallel developments in other cultures? Have there in fact been times

and/or places in which women held genuine and substantial political, economic and social power? If so, what forms did this take? Furthermore, in carrying out this inquiry, how can we distinguish myth from reality? Beliefs about the differing capacities and appropriate activities of the sexes, what Michelle Rosaldo and others have called "gender ideology," are not the same as actual inequities of status, in access to resources, to power, to modes of living, although the one often acts to reinforce the other. Similarly, it is currently fashionable to discuss and to analyze "sex roles" and sex-role sterotyping, and to point out the need to overcome these limitations, in order to liberate both sexes from the trap of expected attitudes and behaviors. But what is often lacking in these discussions is the dimension of power, what Rayna R. Reiter calls "gender hierarchy." For the problem of origins implies not only the tracing of differences, but the exploration of their use in the service of certain kinds of political, economic, and social domination.

In the effort to illuminate this whole complex area of inquiry, enormous pressure has been brought to bear on the discipline of anthropology—the "science of man" (sic). Frustrated historians, psychologists, literary critics, and classicists, among others, have turned to the anthropologists in the hope that their methodological tools and their resources in cross-cultural studies, archeology, and primate behavior can provide scholars in other fields with answers. Rayna R. Reiter, in her suggestive paper, "Unravelling The Problem of Origins: An Anthropological Search for Feminist Theory," responds to this challenge with a general review of what is and what is not known at the present time, along with a feminist critique of the gaps in our knowledge left by a male-oriented tradition of learning.

Reiter traces the oppression of women backward in time, seeking out the crucial moments or junctures at which major changes in the development of civilization may have contributed to the more complete establishment of male dominance. She points out that modern capitalist social organization clearly depends on the continuance of a certain kind of female subordination, but cannot be seen as solely responsible for its origins. Similarly, for the turning point first enunciated by Engels—the creation of the "pristine" state and the property-linked family. The third and final

point of origin Reiter examines is original human society itself, as illuminated by the study of primate behavior, and as inferred, however tentatively, from investigations of "primitive" tribal groups that survive today.

At all these points, Reiter shows, much more research is required. But there is already much evidence to suggest the ways in which the establishment of gender hierarchy is linked to other forms of power structures, and is an inherent part of their development. The paper by Elaine H. Pagels, "When Did Man Make God in His Image? A Case-Study in Religion and Politics," illustrates precisely one such point of evolution. In her paper, Pagels establishes the astonishingly explicit process by which heterodox theories about the female traits of God were systematically excluded from orthodox Christian teachings, while at the same time, heterodox groups—specifically, the gnostic followers of Christianity—were drummed out of the Church because they refused to accept the concept of a male priesthood, closed to women, and indeed, open only to a select group of male leaders.

The study by Pagels shows in considerable detail how the process of establishing an orthodoxy in the early Christian Church, both in terms of correct theology and in terms of how the church hierarchy and membership is to be organized, is linked intimately to the process of taking away options for women. What is involved here is not just who can become a priest, and act thereby as an authority for the Christian flock, but the very qualities of the divine power that the priest and his flock will be praying to.

Pagels' work is thus a concrete example of the process traced by Reiter in broader strokes: at critical moments in the development of civilization, steps are taken to create and to consolidate a certain kind of power—in this case, the power of the Church fathers, as exercised through their religious hierarchy. In this process, there is, among others, one crucial element, and that is, a diminution of the rights and powers of women as a class or social grouping. Indeed, in this case, the symbolic importance of the action is made explicit. In the contemporary documents that Pagels cites, "Paul explains that as God has authority over Christ, so the man has authority over the woman" (p. 37). And, carrying this one step further, so the priesthood has authority over the believers. Domination of

male over female accompanies and is the symbol of other developing forms of hierarchy.

As Reiter and Pagels indicate, the work presented here is tentative, and is intended to encourage much more research in these areas. But it is an important beginning. The data now being sought and uncovered in the search for origins represent the possibility, at some future point, of replacing vague and spurious concepts of "human nature" with concrete information, and of moving away from the covert ideology of male supremacy to a clearly understood and visible pattern of cultural and political development. This pattern, once traced, can be altered. In this manner, feminist scholarship is making, and will continue to make, an important contribution to our knowledge, and knowledge, as Janeway reminds us, is a source of power.

NOTE

I want to express here my thanks and warm appreciation to Jane S. Gould, Director of the Women's Center, and Emily Kofron, Assistant Director, to Susan Riemer Sacks and Nancy K. Miller, Academic Coordinators of the 1974 and 1975 conferences respectively, and to all the conference participants, for their contributions to the planning and to the success of The Scholar and The Feminist III.

June, 1976

OPENING REMARKS

Elizabeth Janeway

I'm very much honored to have the opportunity to welcome the participants in this third conference, held at Barnard, on The Scholar and the Feminist; and, since I took my degree here, some forty years ago, in history, I'm especially pleased to be welcoming you to a discussion of the Search for Origins of the situation and status of women. The exploration of the past, the discovery there of the presence of Woman and women, in areas where our influence and even our existence have been erased, do not simply operate to build up a body of knowledge. They do that, of course, but they also produce a remarkable psychological effect, here and now. For they demonstrate that the Pope is not infallible, and the Emperor needs a loincloth. Feminists who are scholars, scholars who are feminists, are informing the rest of us that orthodox, male scholarship is capable of making quite astonishing mistakes, mistakes both of emphasis and of oversight.

Women scholars, that is, are not only broadening the material now available for scholarly study and, in addition, illuminating questions that had not been thought worthy of attention, they are also raising the whole matter of significance and definition. The power to define, to name, to evaluate and to assign importance to events and to processes, is one of the greatest powers which any establishment can wield. In the past, it has almost always been the experience of the powerful which has been thought worthy of study, and their judgments which have prevailed. If the governed rest of us have been considered at all, it has been as fodder for the proper exercises of governance, or as awful warnings of what can happen if orthodoxy is challenged. Even the advent of the social

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Elizabeth Janeway, novelist and feminist theorist, is a Trustee of Barnard College.

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sciences, which followed the rise of the middle-class to a position where its presence could not be overlooked, did not really change things much. The 19th Century idea of PROGRESS, of history as pursuing a forward course from the primitive through the barbaric to the civilized, one step after another, still subordinated the reality of human life to its usefulness as propaganda for orthodox thinking and orthodox political power. And this idea dominated the social sciences for many decades.

To some extent it still does, though in a vulgarzed—perhaps I might say bastardized—form. Certainly the search for the biological origins of human behavior in pre-human forms of life can—I think should—be seen as sort of modernization of progressivism, a neo-neo Darwinism. In this modernized form, it's true, progressivism has rather turned into regressivism. What is being sought is not the steps toward civilization, that crowning glory of man as the 19th century saw it, but the animal instincts of aggression and territoriality which guarantee that civilization is fundamentally impossible and the human interaction can never become secure. A century ago—if we want to put this into a feminist perspective for a moment—our great-grandmothers (well, your greats, my grandmothers) were being told that the inspired and inspiring labors of men had brought the human race to a point where even women might soon be spared the drudgery, the malnutrition and the pains and dangers of childbirth which had been their lot previously. Praise Adam! Today we are still told that men have been the originators and the forwarders of civilization, but we are being warned not to count on the quality of the product or of the producer either. Adam, it seems, is not the sturdy type we had imagined. His psyche is fragile, his control over his animal drives is precarious. We can praise him if we want to, but not out of joy. We should do it in order to bolster his ego and keep him from falling apart. What he really needs is nurture and support so that he can go on holding together such fragments of civilization as still survive. If, on the other hand, we threaten him—who knows what will happen? Something too dire to predict.

Poor old Adam, being reversely discriminated against! Doesn't it shake you up?

Not much, I hope. Certainly the presence of so many distinguished woman scholars here today points to a new determina-

tion among women to define and value our own goals and methods, our own world view. Now, let me say at once that I don't see this as a reverse of the masculine view, a dichotomized half-scene, but as an extension of an inadequate view toward one that is fully human. A new sense of the serious value of women's experience opens up new vistas for all of history, for the social sciences and in the arts. As an example, let me report on the experience of a woman law professor, Marjorie Fine Knowles, at the University of Alabama. What was really needed, she found, was not a tacked-on-the-outside course in the curriculum dealing with women and the law—though there's no reason not to have one—but the incorporation of material about women's needs and demands in the regular curriculum, so that the first-year law students do not live in a dream-world of totally masculine torts, or fraud, but discover that women too are torted against or engage in fraudulent practices. Courses concentrating on women are a valuable first step in many fields, but they can not only be dropped all too easily in bad times; inevitably they produce a certain ghettoization of the material, unless and until it is accepted into the mainstream curriculum. One way it gets there, of course, is thanks to courses specializing in women—for students who have encountered new material there carry it with them into other classrooms. The questions they ask as a result can often alert a professor to a whole range of ideas of which he had been ignorant. He may, of course, resent it. But if it happens often enough, he will not be able to ignore it, and some women's voices will thus begin to be heard in fields where they had been silent.

Feminist scholars, then, are not only drawing attention to unused riches of knowledge, they are re-working the whole canon of received wisdom. Think of yourselves as yeasts, why don't you, fermenting away in the soggy dough of orthodox learning, or turning insipid grape-juice into wine. In addition, since women's studies are by nature interdisciplinary, they continually set up cross-links between areas, encouraging a reciprocal interchange of ideas and techniques. Such reciprocity appears to lie in the mainstream of modern scholarship, for not only the social sciences but the hard sciences as well are increasingly talking to each other and forming new alliances. If there were disciplines called social psychology and biochemistry when I was in college, they were very

new babies. Now party-lines have been set up—maybe conference calls is a more up-to-date phrase—all over the place. In fact, when I was out at a large midwestern state campus recently, I discovered that they actually boasted a department called—Interdisciplinary Studies. It does sound a little like taking a degree in Salad Bar, I must say. But then, scholars who are feminist do, of course, have a real focus, and a great deal that is pertinent to say to each other.

And now you are about to start saying it. But before I close, I want to extend one very special welcome to a special participant: a distinguished scholar, a firm and pragmatic feminist—our President-to-be here at Barnard, Dr. Jacquelyn Mattfeld.

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UNRAVELING THE PROBLEM OF ORIGINS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL SEARCH FOR FEMINIST THEORY

Rayna R. Reiter

The search for origins is a theme which unites much of the recent wave of feminist scholarship. That this should be so comes as no surprise. Feminism, and the research whose perspective it informs, assumes that women's experience in any and every aspect of culture, while broadly shaped by the same forces which define male experience, is not reducible to it. The recognition of significant differences in male-female lifeways leads us immediately to speculate on the origins of those differences. Furthermore, under specific conditions, the differences between males and females are used to justify and underwrite power differentials as well. It is this question of the origins and perpetuation of gender-linked power hierarchies which lies at the heart of the feminist perspective. Implicitly or explicitly, feminism asserts that our society has a *problem* in the form of gender hierarchies, and that our problem cries out for a solution. In whatever framework we individually cast our understandings of male-female inequalities, we are united in our identification of the problematic. Feminists inside and outside the academy share a commitment to two tasks: spreading consciousness of the existence of gender hierarchy, and collective action aimed at dismantling it. But before a structure of inequality can be dismantled, we must first know the base on which it rests. Thus our common search for origins is implicitly a search for a strategy with a politicized goal. The problem has been felicitously stated by Gayle Rubin, a feminist anthropologist.

Rayna R. Reiter teaches anthropology in the Graduate Division of The New School for Social Research.

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If innate male agression and dominance are at the root of female oppression, then the feminist program would logically require either the extermination of the offending sex, or else a eugenics project to modify its character. If sexism is a by-product of capitalism's relentless appetite for profit, then sexism would wither away in the advent of a successful socialist revolution. If the world historic defeat of women occurred at the hands of an armed patriarchal revolt, then it is time for amazon guerrillas to start training in the Adirondacks.[1]

Our notions concerning a problem's origins contribute to our strategy of attack. This much of our joint endeavor is clear.

Yet we all approach the question of the origins of gender inequality from very different perspectives, depending in part on the fields in which we were trained. Narrow disciplinary boundaries get in the way of our asking substantive questions, and we seek to transcend them. Feminist studies have generated exciting, and frustrating, attempts at interdisciplinary, or better still, transdisciplinary, research and teaching. We have all made sorties into fields which appear to possess answers to questions our own fields cannot pose. We eagerly turn to other areas for help in solving the puzzle that sexual roles and statuses present. All too often we find that the pieces we are seeking to assemble are not only scattered, but warped and fragmented in a multiplicity of compartments in the contemporary academy. Each and all of us have faced in our own disciplines the glaring and systematic oversights, both theoretical and methodological, surrounding our questions about gender hierarchies. As we search for origins, we think critically, and find ourselves unraveling many strands which knit together the fabric of our respective fields. The unraveling is a frustrating and time-consuming activity; we are forced to do an archaeological investigation of the very facts and theories we possess before we attempt to utilize them. Yet we cannot reweave our individual strands into a collective mesh strong enough to support significant knowledge concerning gender until the potential contributions of each field are critically examined. Our examinations also force us to repair the splits which created many of our academic fields in the first place; we cannot solve our gender-problem except by pooling our common issues and knowledge. Because we have a significant and genuine problem—gender hierarchies— we are confronted with the inherently transdisciplinary question of their true origins.

Only the broadest most collective investigations will contribute to the demise of the inequalities we analyze.

My own feminist search for origins is filtered through anthropology, the field in which I was trained. Anthropology provides us with information of a broad, comparative nature about societies with radically differing bases of social organization. As I see it, the critical unraveling of theory and data concerning the origins of gender hierarchies must proceed backwards. In broad terms, we must first strip away what we can identify as recent restructurings and accretions that have taken up older patterns of male-female ranking systems and distorted or transformed them. We can identify crucial junctures in which gender relations have changed qualitatively. We must examine such junctures for what each may tell us about the origins and dynamics of sexual inequality. For me, that unraveling focuses on three major moments, or junctures, in which we can clearly see a reorganization of major social structures, including those which organize gender relations. Let me stress that my selection of "moments" is not the only possible one. My choices have been made in order to unify many lines of inquiry. Each of them has been a major focus of research in anthropology, and in other fields. Each requires an interdisciplinary investigation to be truly understood. For me, such significant moments begin in our recent history and progress toward our most ancient past. I begin with modern gender hierarchies for two reasons. First, examining the contemporary situation emphasizes those conditions which require immediate change, and insures the relevance of our research. Second, in understanding those portions of our gender problem which are contemporary, we guard ourselves against universalizing ethnocentric notions of gender organization onto other cultures and histories. Passing, then, from recent to ancient, the junctures for me are: the origins and effects of modern capitalism; the origins and processes of pristine state formation; and the characteristics of gender organization in original human society itself. In each, the potentialities of gender relations must be examined if we are to understand both our problem and its solution.

The massive social transformations which accompany the origins of modern capitalism have been analyzed and debated for virtually as long as the system itself has existed. The effects of capitalism

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have been investigated in and out of the academy for over a century, and have taken center-stage in the works of those who would reform or overthrow the system, as well as those who simply want to study it. Whether one turns to the histories of the various socialist and communist internationals, or to the works of political economists, historians, sociologists, and cultural theoreticians, one finds important perspectives concerning the lives of women. Both the activist tradition associated with women and men such as Engels, Bebel, Kollantai, and Goldman, and the recent wave of scholarship emanating from universities, have focused on two arenas: the home and the workplace.[2] In each, the drastic effects of capitalism are studied in detail, but the exact interpretation of those effects remains in dispute. Recent discussions of the history of the family take diametrically opposing points of view, some claiming that it was capitalism that threw us into nucleated isolation, others that the nuclear family was the absolute precondition for industrial development of the West.[3] Not only the form of the family, but its affective and ideological content and control over its members is up for grabs: Shorter has recently gone so far as to claim that early industrialization liberated both male and female sexuality, while Scott, Tilly and Cohen argue persuasively that such an interpretation is a frivolous reading of the difficult life circumstances under which young women migrated and worked in early factories.[4] We have a great deal of information on patterns of female employment and unemployment, increasing sexual segregation and wage-differentiation in jobs, and of course, the radical separation of the home from the workplace.[5] Yet the exact relations between the structure of the family and household, and its integration into a mode of production which oppresses women doubly and differently than men, are subjects requiring further analysis. Whatever we conclude about the effects of capitalism on the status of women, it is clear that the system is built upon forms of sexual hierarchy which have still deeper roots. Capitalism inherited from its own past such sexual inequalities as wage, inheritance and property-holding differentials, as well as judicial systems which were sex-biased, and the peasant patriarchal family.[6] It transformed these structures to new and more elaborate purposes, but it did not invent them. Contemporary capitalism has a stake in maintaining the sex-segregated labor force, and the consuming bourgeois family. Yet prior to the modern forms of

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political economic hierarchies, which oppress women, there exist more ancient layers of gender differentiation and discrimination.

In delineating these more archaic patterns, my second focus in the search for origins is the origin of the pristine state. A vast terrain of history and social development separates modern capitalism from this more ancient moment in hierarchy formation, and much specific work is needed to fill it in. Nonetheless, this radical leap into the human past seems justified to me; for the origin of the state was a major solidification of class and gender differentiation on which virtually all forms of kingdom and empire were ultimately founded. When we understand this political apparatus, we have a tool for analyzing how categories of people are classified as dominant and subservient, and what sorts of specifically ideological as well as material bases sustain the differentiation.

A well-developed, interdisciplinary tradition of research exists on the question of state origins. Archaeology, ancient history, the fields of religion and art history, as well as anthropology, have made important contributions.[7] Once again, the activist political tradition exemplified in Engels' great work, *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State*, helps to inform our thinking. While contemporary data supersede anything available when the treatise was written, Engels' basic hypotheses still merit attention. His schema links the growth of private property to the dismantling of a collective, communal kinship base in prestate society. In this process, marriage grows more restrictive, legitimacy of heirs more important, and wives generally become means of reproduction for the benefit of their husbands. At the same time, reciprocal relations amongst kinsfolk are curtailed, and productive resources, once held by the entire kin group, become privatized. Estates or classes arise out of formerly kin-based social organization which was egalitarian. In this analysis, the creation of a class hierarchy is intimately linked to the creation of the patriarchal family. The restrictions on women's status emerge with class society, and are underwritten by a state apparatus which penetrates and defines the family.

Modern archaeology and social theory, with a vastly more sophisticated data base, should, in principle, be able to confirm, reject or modify Engels' schema. Careful analyses have been performed on the role of population pressure, long-distance trade,

warfare, and theocracy in early state formation. We know a great deal about the division of labor between elites and mass producers under these social circumstances, but almost nothing about the division of labor by gender. Mainstream archaeology has not addressed itself to the question of women's status in archaic society. Yet information exists on the intertwined forms of hierarchy that we now retrospectively label "patriarchy" and "class," *if* the questions are properly framed. Very recent research by feminist anthropologists and historians of religion illustrate small portions of the process, and lead us to ask new questions. For example, Silverblatt's study of gender ideology among the Inca of Peru points out that males and females had distinct religious and political organizations which ran parallel to one another. These parallel bases were available to be ranked one above the other as conquest and state-formation proceeded. Leavitt's work on kin and class in Sumer and Crete compares a city-state in which women held primary public power, with one in which men did. Gailey's investigation of recent state-making on a Polynesian island illuminates the role that elite women played. Chiefly women participated in downgrading female work amongst the masses. At the same time, they lost their chiefly perogatives, once shared with their men, as inheritance of power became male. Such studies are merely pieces of a much larger puzzle whose dimensions we are only beginning to outline.[8] It would be most inappropriate to draw any conclusions about the effects of state formation on gender hierarchy at this point. Yet these scattered attempts suggest that a devaluation of the roles, activities, and ideologies associated with women is part and parcel of the process. Engels' depiction will require updating and modification, especially as we learn more about the ideological apparatus involved in state formation. But it is unlikely to be jettisoned; his basic insight into the intimate link between the destruction of kin-based organization and changes in the status of the masses of women appears quite sound.

The two processes which I have outlined—the origins of modern capitalism and of state formation—can be seen simultaneously at work in an arena which has served as a brutal laboratory for testing their effects. I am referring to Western penetration of those parts of the globe we now euphemistically call the Third World. As the Western world, already organized into expansionary capitalist states, colonized and imperialized other continents, it imposed its

own complex forms of hierarchy on the peoples it dominated. Within relatively short periods, radical reorderings of indigenous societies occurred which enforced both patriarchal and class organization. We can learn much about the origins of gender hierarchy (as well as other forms of hierarchy) from examining the confrontation between the West and the areas it has penetrated. But we must exercise a great deal of caution; each of the encounters was particular to its time and place. We cannot subsume the vast diversity exhibited by human culture in the Americas, in Africa, in Asia during the rise of the West under one single, simple model of precapitalist society. Each cultural area had its own forms of polity, economy, religious and gender organization. The unique patterns of each culture conditioned resistance, acceptance, or modification of Western hierarchies in what became colonized countries. Furthermore, we cannot assume that the enforced penetration of colonization simply replicated the processes of state stratification and capitalist accumulation in Western civilization. It obviously did not.[9] Nonetheless, certain patterns surrounding the imposition of gender hierarchy occur in many different studies of colonial penetration and rule. The experience of women in Africa, Asia, and the Americas does suggest that colonizing powers, already male-dominant, rather effectively dismantled women's work organizations, social and political structures, religious and ritual roles.[10] The history of exactly how women's particular forms of social organization were undercut and their status demoted suggests two lines of inquiry. Firstly, the process of demobilizing women occurs when essentially parallel forms of organization between women and men are subsumed into one, and that one is male. Leadership roles and activities formerly associated with men are legitimated, while those associated with women are devaluated or obliterated.[11] Van Allen's work (1972) concerning the political associations of Igbo women that were frozen out by British colonialism is a perfect example. Secondly, the colonial cases suggest that precapitalist, prestate societies are organized into gender parallels, themselves stemming from social relations of production surrounding division of labor by sex.[12] If such forms of gender organization exist, under what conditions are they used not only to differentiate males and females, but also to rank them? Under what conditions were precolonial parallel forms granted different status?

It is the question of ranking—the assignment of greater valuation and status to some groups or individuals—which we pose in examing the third nexus in the search for origins. When we explore the qualities of life in original society we are asking questions which are essentially reflexive, which allow us to examine the range of human potentialities. Anthropology contemplates and analyzes the primitive. It is joined in this endeavor by a range of perspectives similarly afflicted with a curiosity about original society—these range from philosophy to evolutionary biology, primatology and archaeology. Depending on the path chosen to approach it, the examination of the primitive (in the sense of original) provides philosophical space to project the questions: was life in the Paleolithic nasty, brutish and short, especially for women; did societies now described as egalitarian by anthropologists exhibit realms of autonomy for the two sexes, or were gender-ranking systems part of the human experience from the dawn of culture? The data-base for our generalizations has many layers. It includes arrays of stones and bones beyond the scope of this presentation, but certainly of relevance to the questions being posed. It also includes the evidence provided by nonhuman primates—monkeys and apes—and the rich and varied experiences of contemporary foraging populations, who often serve as projective tests for our notions about our common human past.[13]

In the last ten years, primatological investigations have revised our understanding of the biosocial background from which the human species emerged. Increasingly, the image of an aggressive, baboon-like heritage fraught with clear-cut male dominance is being rejected. Recent field reports reveal that the behavior of nonhuman primates exhibits a great range of possibilities. There are variations in sex roles within species such as baboons, and social organization ranges from monogamous gibbon "families" to female-centered monkey-troops, to complex, multi-structured chimpanzee hordes. Male-female behavior patterns are part of larger, flexible behavioral repertoires which must be viewed in evolutionary and ecological perspective. Amongst all the nonhuman primates, learning and the openness of response patterns are clearly of prime importance. We have also become sensitized to the crucial role of the mother-infant dyad in group socialization and continuity, in status hierarchy, and in collective movements.[14] "Male aggression," once believed to be innate and a

virtually universal millstone around our evolutionary necks, is increasingly seen as contextual. There are varying patterns of success in acquiring resources for males and females, for young and for old, depending on whether we are examining sexual access, procuring of food, sleeping niches, protection from predators, etc. Similarly, female nonhuman primates have become the subject of more complex understandings. As they are increasingly viewed as active, core members of their groups, we female *human* primates acquire a new perspective on what the origin of society may have been like.

Contemporary foraging populations (those which hunt and gather, rather than produce food) provide fascinating glimpses of very basic human social organization. A word of caution is in order, however: our use of such groups as models for original human society is based on a set of evolutionary and ecological assumptions concerning the social structures in which people lived for millions of years prior to sedentarization and food-production in human history. We cannot literally interpret the lives of existent foraging peoples—such as the Kung bushmen of the Kalahari, the Eskimos, the Australian Aboriginal groups—each with its own concrete, specific history, as exhibits and replications of processes we speculate to have occurred in the Paleolithic. Neither can we assume that the decapitated, decimated, marginalized existence of peoples pushed to the edges of their environment by thousands of years of penetration will exhibit "original" characteristics. Yet on the basis of what these hunting-gathering groups that resist total capitulation or assimilation suggest, we can gain some insights into the social organization of small-scale, mobile kin-based society, which is what we assume original society was like. Further revisions in our view of original society will be based on recent investigations of the division of labor by sex and social relations surrounding it, family roles, and child socialization among foragers.[15] These studies tentatively suggest that there is a great deal more flexibility to gender roles than we had formerly assumed; that women's collective work processes and the social relations built up around them are different from, but not necessarily considered inferior to, those of men. Such studies do not banish the issue of male dominance in primitive society. They do, however, suggest that Western, male-dominant assumptions which anthropologists bring to their field studies must first be examined before we project our

notions of female subordination onto the primitive world.[16] They also suggest new questions about the bases on which gender differentiations and possibly hierarchies might be built. Ritual roles and resources, labor differences and exchanges are currently the subject of renewed investigation.[17] When and where female subordination is found in research informed by female-sensitized perspectives, then *its* cultural bases and origins (rather than our own Western, fetishized notion of universal biological origins to sex hierarchy) must be investigated. Among feminist anthropologists debate continues on the meaning of primitive evidence regarding the questions surrounding women's symbolic and material conditions.[18] The work of dismantling the male-biased intellectual edifice which has structured our understandings is is under way, and feminist research is already yielding revisions.

Such revisions have already sent some researchers back to the question of matriarchy. Mainstream anthropology has long rejected the notion of matriarchal origins in human society. Renewed interest in matriarchy has been voiced from within, and especially from without, the academy. A few recent works have attempted to specify and examine data pertaining to female-ruled societies.[19] Most new studies take another tack, however. They focus on the *meaning* of the concept of matriarchy itself, for it represents a projection of women's power, or powerlessness, in society. Some studies trace the sexual politics of the matriarchy debates, pointing out that the presumed control of matriarchs was linked to denigrating conditions of primitivity. "Progress" out of the primitive condition could then conveniently be linked to the decline of female power.[20] This concern with our original condition—matriarchal or not—reveals a great deal about new sensitivities within social science to issues raised by feminism. Perspectives stated in the debates lead to exploration of gender differences formerly glossed over. Women's real and symbolic value as reproducers is being critically examined, as are models concerning the origin and distribution of power.[21] Finally, it is not simply the evidence we unearth concerning how gender systems originate and operate that is important; it is the collective consciousness we construct in building such new understandings that will prove valuable as we struggle to change our own present.

Unraveling the origins of sexual hierarchies is a huge undertaking. Each feminist researcher must daily perform the same

sort of "archaeology of knowledge" in her field that I'm illustrating for my own. Like me, she must often run into theoretical muddles and gaps of information which make the process a frustrating one. It will easily be decades before our ranks will yield work that can do for us what a Marx, a Weber, a Freud, a Lévi-Strauss have done for their areas. Yet in a sense, the point of my remarks is that we are *not* aiming to replicate that process by which individual men, stunningly well-educated as scholars, and totally confident of their mission as critical thinkers, redefine a tradition, and give it new direction. What we are now attempting is something at once less grand and more consciously collective. For if we are children of the patriarchs of our respective intellectual traditions, we are also sisters in a women's movement which struggles to define new forms for social process in research and in action. In our role as sisters we aim for a shared, more reciprocal notion of engaged research. We sense our responsibility to resist the compartmentalized nature of the contemporary academy, and to use the genuine, substantive nature of our inquiry to bring us together. In the process, we cannot help but use the question of the origins of gender hierarchy to focus our collective and necessarily transdisciplinary work to better inform and support all contributions toward dismantling that structure of inequality.

NOTES

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1. Rubin (1975), pp. 157-8.
2. The activist tradition, mainly Marxist, is briefly reviewed in Rowbotham (1972). See also Leacock (1972), Bebel (1971) and Kollantai (1972, 1975). Overviews of the history of capitalism, including some of its effects on women and the family, are found in Thompson (1963), Hill (1964), Clark (1920) and Pinchbeck (1930). Most histories focus on changes in the workplace and the household, to the exclusion of other settings in which relevant social arrangements existed, such as the neighborhood, religious groups, and schools. However, recent feminist history has begun to rectify this situation. See, e.g., the papers from the Berkshire Women's History Conferences printed annually in *Feminist Studies*.
3. Reviews of the history of the family literature can be found in Berkner (1973) and Lasch (1975). The *History of Childhood Quarterly* carries ongoing debates on the subject, and many journals (e.g., *Journal of Marriage and the Family* and *Past and Present*) have carried special issues on it in recent years.
4. Shorter (1973, 1975); Scott and Tilly (1975); Scott, Tilly and Cohen (1976).
5. The overt and concealed relations between home and workplace have been the subject of much recent analysis. The Wages for Housework movement has generated a great deal of debate concerning the value of the work women perform in the household. See, for example, Dallacosta (1972), Edmond and Fleming (1975), Zaretsky (1975), Secombe (1973), and Gardiner (1975). Relations between capitalism and patriarchy are analyzed in Hartmann (1974, 1976). The recent history of housework under capitalism is discussed by Ehrenreich and English (1975).
6. For descriptions of work and home conditions in which female subservience predates capitalism, see Pinchbeck (1930), Scott and Tilly (1975), Davis (1974), and Ryan (1975). While not all of these authors draw similar conclusions, I consider their collective data strong support for labeling the pattern a precapitalist one.

7. For a review of theories of the origin of the state, see Service (1975). See also Leacock (1972), and Sabloff and Lamberg-Karlovsky (1974).

8. Ground-breaking work was done in this area by Leacock (1972). Manuscripts by Gailey, Leavitt (1976a), Muller, and Silverblatt contribute specific case histories. A recently organized study group of New York-based feminist anthropologists is currently working on this issue.

9. Some Marxist scholars have used a perspective which focuses on the direct links between the development of the capitalist West and the underdevelopment of the areas it colonized. See for example Williams (1944), Rodney (1972), Frank (1969), Cockcroft, Frank and Johnson (1972), and Emmanuel (1972).

10. The systematic limitation and destruction of women's work patterns is discussed in Boserup (1970) and in Mintz (1971). Social and political demobilization is analyzed in Nash (1975), Van Allen (1972, 1974), and Bossen (1973). Religious and ritual exclusion is suggested in Remy (1975), Holden (1974), and Barkow (1972).

11. In addition to Van Allen (1972), see Leacock and Nash (1975) for examples.

12. This position is implicit in many of the studies cited above. It is cogently argued in a recent paper by Siskind (1976).

13. The decision to focus on the nonhuman primates and the foraging peoples is one of perspective and methodology. Other issues of crucial importance, such as the meaning systems of myth and symbol as they refer to women, are not included in this brief discussion. I feel it is important to examine the social relations of gender as they are built out of relations of production as a base. Questions of belief and ideology are better addressed once they have been situated in interaction with that base.

14. For recent work on primate data which includes the role of females and a less stereotyped understanding of sex relations in primate social organization, see Leavitt (1975), Leibowitz (1975), Lancaster (1975), and Rowell (1972).

15. Articles which specifically address bias in reporting and new data concerning females in foraging societies include Slocum (1975), Leibowitz and Raymond, Draper (1975), Leavitt (1975), and Leavitt, Weatherford and Sykes (1975).

16. Leacock's work on ethnohistorical materials surrounding North American Indians illustrates changes which can be traced to the primitive-civilized encounter and its analysis. These changes include both male dominance, and male bias in reporting

dominance (1975, 1976). The issue of colonialist perspective in general is analyzed in Asad (1973) and Diamond (1974).

17. See for example Rosaldo and Collier (1975) on hunting and sexual exchanges, and Siskind (1976) on kinship and the division of labor by sex.

18. The questions raised by the women's movement have stimulated productive work among feminist anthropologists. Collections such as Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974), Matthiasson (1974), Reiter (1975), and Leavitt (1976) include a range of perspectives. Some of the authors in these volumes argue for universal male dominance, at least in the symbolic realm, while others claim that the primitive world provided autonomy for both genders. All contribute to our tool-kit of ways to think about the problem of female subordination.

19. Reed (1975) is the most recent example. Leavitt (1976a) analyzes the archaeological data available for Crete, described as matriarchal.

20. See Fee (1973), Bamberger (1974), and Webster (1975).

21. See for example Rubin (1975), Ortner (1972), Chodorow (1974), and Stack *et al.* (1975).

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WHEN DID MAN MAKE GOD IN HIS IMAGE? A CASE STUDY IN RELIGION AND POLITICS

Elaine H. Pagels

Whoever knows Western religious tradition knows in whose image its God is made—the God who is characterized as King, Lord, Master, Judge, and Father. Unlike many of his contemporaries among the deities of the ancient Near East, the God of Israel shares his power with no female divinity, nor is he the divine husband or lover of any.[1] He scarcely can be characterized in any but masculine epithets.[2] Indeed, this absence of feminine imagery for God marks Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as a striking contrast to the world's religious traditions from Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome to Africa, Polynesia, India, and North America, which abound in feminine symbolism.

Theologians—Jewish, Christian, and Islamic—are quick to point out that God is not to be considered in sexual terms at all. Yet the actual language they use daily in worship and prayer conveys a different message. Who, raised in any of these traditions, has escaped the distinct impression that God is to be thought of in exclusively *masculine* terms? It is true that Catholics revere Mary as the mother of Jesus. She cannot, however, be identified as divine in her own right: if she is "mother of God," she is not "God the Mother" on an equal footing with God the Father!

Christians recognize that their tradition has added the trinitarian terms to the Jewish description of God. Yet of the three divine "Persons," remarkably enough, two—the Father and Son—are described in masculine terms, and the third—the Spirit—conveys the sexlessness of the Greek neuter term *pneuma*. Whoever investigates the early development of Christianity—the field called

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Elaine H. Pagels is Chairperson of the Barnard College Department of Religion.

"patristics," that is, study of "the fathers of the church"—may not be surprised by the passage that concludes the recently discovered, secret *Gospel of Thomas*:

> *Simon Peter said to them [the disciples]: Let Mary be excluded from among us, for she is a woman, and not worthy of the Life. Jesus said: Behold, I will take Mary, and make her a male, so that she may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For I tell you truly, that every female who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*[3]

Strange as it sounds, this only states explicitly what religious rhetoric often assumes: that the men form the legitimate body of the community, while women participate insofar as their identity is assimilated to that of the men.

Further exploration of the discoveries which include this *Gospel*—a series of papyrus texts, hidden in large clay jars nearly 1600 years ago—discloses some astonishing evidence of feminine images of God. Scholars investigating these texts have identified them as Jewish and Christian gnostic texts which were attacked and condemned as "heretical" as early as 100-150 A.D. Currently, certain scholars are asking the critical question: what distinguishes these "heterodox" texts from those that are called "orthodox?"

One distinguishing mark, at any rate, is clear: these gnostic texts, by contrast with orthodox ones, abound in sexual symbolism—and, in particular, in feminine images of God. One might expect, then, that they would resemble the archaic pagan traditions of the Mother Goddess, but, on the contrary, here the language is specifically Christian, unmistakably related to a Jewish heritage. Furthermore, while we have long known that early Christians diverge from Israel's strict monism by describing God in the "three persons" of the Trinity, now we can see how certain gnostic Christians diverged even more radically from Jewish tradition. Instead of the God who is monistic and masculine, certain of these texts describe God as a *dyadic* being, who consists of *both* masculine and feminine elements.

One such group, for example, claims to have received secret tradition from Jesus through James, and, significantly, through Mary Magdalene.[4] Members of this group offer prayer to *both* the divine Father and Mother:

> *From Thee, Father, and through Thee, Mother, the two immortal names, Parents of the divine being, and thou, dweller in heaven, mankind of the mighty name...*[5]

Other texts indicate that their authors had pondered the question to whom a single, masculine God could have proposed, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1.26). Since the Genesis account goes on to say that mankind was created "male and female" (1.27), some concluded, apparently, that the God in whose image we are created likewise must be both masculine and feminine—both Father and Mother.

How do these sources characterize the divine Mother? The answer cannot be a simple one, since the texts are extraordinarily diverse. We may, however, suggest three primary characterizations.

First, a certain poet and teacher, Valentinus, begins with the premise that God is essentially indescribable. He suggests, however, that what is divine can be imagined as a Dyad consisting of two elements: one he calls the Ineffable, the Source, Primal Father; the other, the Silence, the Mother of all things.[6] Valentinus reasons, apparently, that Silence is the appropriate complement of what is Ineffable. He may take his clue from the different gender of the Greek words when he suggests that these two constitute the masculine and feminine components within the divine being. Followers of Valentinus invoke this feminine power, whom they also call *Grace* (in Greek, the feminine term *charis*) in their own private celebration of the Christian eucharist: they call her "divine, eternal Grace, She who is before all things."[7] At other times they pray to her for protection as the Mother, "Thou enthroned with God, eternal, mystical Silence."[8] Marcus, a disciple of Valentinus, says that "when Moses began his account of creation, he mentioned the Mother of all things at the very beginning, when he said, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,' for the word 'beginning' (in Greek, the feminine *arche*) refers to the Divine Mother."[9]

What do these gnostics have in mind when they describe God in this way? Different writers disagree: some say that the divine is to be considered masculofeminine—the "great male-female power." Others insist that the terms are meant only as metaphors: that in reality, the divine is *neither* masculine nor feminine. A third group suggests that one can describe the Source of all things in *either* masculine or feminine terms, depending on which aspect one intends to stress.[10] Proponents of these diverse views agree, apparently, that the divine is to be understood as consisting of a harmonious, dynamic relationship of opposites—a concept that

may be akin to the eastern view of *yin* and *yang*, but remains antithetical to orthodox Judaism and Christianity.

Secondly, the divine Mother is often described as Holy Spirit. One source, the *Secret Book of John*, relates how John, the brother of Jesus, went out after the crucifixion with "great grief," and, in his words,

> *As I was grieving...the heavens were opened, and the whole creation shone with an unearthly light, and the universe was shaken. I was afraid, and behold...a unity in three forms appeared to me, and I marvelled: how can a unity have three forms?*

"John" continues to recount this mystical vision of the Trinity:

> *It said to me, "John, John, why do you doubt, or why do you fear?...I am the One who is with you always: I am the Father;I am the Mother; I am the Son."*[11]

Here "John" offers an interpretation of the Trinity—as Father, Mother, and Son. After a moment of shock, one may recognize this as an obvious idea—perhaps as a more natural and spontaneous symbol than the more familiar Trinity. The Greek terminology, which includes the neuter term for Spirit (*pneuma*), virtually requires that the third "Person" of the Trinity be asexual. The author of the *Secret Book*, on the other hand, derives the term instead from the Hebrew term for Spirit, *Ruah*—a feminine word—and thus concludes, logically enough, that the feminine "Person" conjoined with Father and Son must be the Mother! The text goes on to describe the Spirit as

> *The image of the invisible virginal perfect spirit...She became the mother of the all, for she existed before them all, the mother-father [metropater].*[12]

The same author interprets Genesis 1.2 ("the Spirit of God moved upon the fact of the deep") by saying that "the Mother then was moved..."[13] The apocryphal *Gospel to the Hebrews* likewise relates that Jesus speaks of "my Mother, the Spirit."[14] According to the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus contrasts his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, with his divine Father—the Father of Truth—and his divine Mother, the Holy Spirit. The author interprets a puzzling saying from the New Testament ("whoever does not hate his father and mother is not worthy of me") by adding that Jesus went on to say,

> *Whoever does not love his father and his mother in my way*

cannot be my disciple, for my [earthly] mother [gave me death] but my true Mother gave me the Life.[15]

Another secret gnostic gospel, the *Gospel of Phillip*, declares that whoever becomes a Christian "gains both a father and a mother."[16] The author refers explicitly to the feminine Hebrew term to describe the Spirit as "Mother of many."[17]

If these sources suggest that the Spirit constitutes the maternal element of the Trinity, the *Gospel of Phillip* makes an equally radical suggestion concerning the doctrine that later develops as the *virgin birth*. Here again the Spirit is praised as both Mother and Virgin, the counterpart—and consort—of the Heavenly Father. "If I may utter a mystery, the Father of the all united with the Virgin who came down"[18]—that is, with the Spirit. Yet because this process is to be understood symbolically, not literally, the Spirit remains a virgin! The author explains that "for this reason, Christ was 'born of a virgin'"—that is, of the Spirit, his divine Mother. But the author ridicules those "literal-minded" Christians who mistakenly refer virgin birth to Mary, Jesus' earthly mother, as if she conceived apart from Joseph. "Such persons do not know what they are saying; for when did a female ever impregnate a female?"[19] Instead, it refers to the mysterious union of the two divine powers, the Father of the All with the Holy Spirit: this is disclosed to be the secret meaning of the virgin birth.

Certain gnostics suggest a third characterization of God as Mother, besides the eternal, mystical Silence, and besides the Holy Spirit: she also appears as Wisdom. Here again the Greek feminine term *wisdom*, like the term for spirit, *Ruah*, translates a Hebrew feminine term, *Hokhmah*. Early interpreters had pondered the meaning of, for example, Proverbs: "God made the world in Wisdom." Could Wisdom be the feminine power in which God's creation is "conceived?" In such passages, at any rate, Wisdom bears two connotations: first, she bestows the Spirit that makes mankind wise; second, she is a creative power. One gnostic source calls her the "first universal creator."[20] Another says that God the Father was speaking to her when he proposed to "make mankind in our image."[21] One mystical writing, the *Great Announcement*, explains the Genesis account in terms of the

one power that is above and below, self-generating, self-discovering, its own mother; its own father; its own sister; its own spouse; its own daughter; its own son: Father, Mother, unity, Root of all things.[22]

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The same author explains the mystical meaning of the Garden of Eden: this, he says, symbolizes the womb.

> *Scripture teaches us that this is what is meant when Isaiah says, "I am he that formed thee in thy mother's womb" [Isaiah 44.2]. The Garden of Eden, then, is Moses' symbolic term for the womb, and Eden the placenta, and the river which comes out of Eden the navel, which nourishes the foetus...*[23]

This teacher claims that the Exodus, consequently, symbolizes the exodus from the womb, "and the crossing of the Red Sea, they say, refers to the blood." He adds that evidence for this view comes directly from "the cry of the newborn" which he says is a spontaneous cry of praise for "the glory of the primal being, in which all the powers above are in harmonious embrace."[24]

At this point we may ask for what reasons Christian tradition (since about 150 A.D.) systematically has excluded such feminine images of God. Every one of the texts I've been citing—secret "gospels," revelations, mystical teachings—are among those rejected from the select list of 27 that now constitute the "New Testament" collection. Certainly gnostic Christians revered and read these writings, such as the Gospel of Thomas, along with the gospels of Mark, John, Luke, and Matthew. Nevertheless, without exception, these writings were condemned as "heretical" by those who called themselves "orthodox" (literally, "straight-thinking") Christians. By around the year 200 A.D., virtually all the feminine images for God had disappeared from what we know as "orthodox" Christian tradition. The figure of God became exclusively the God who is described in masculine terms (and, you note, in authoritarian terms) as God of Israel, Father, Master, King, Lord, and Judge.

Why were gnostic Christians condemned as "heretics," and why was their dyadic conception of God labelled "heresy?" The gnostics themselves asked this question, and pondered it among themselves. Some concluded that the God of Israel himself initiated the polemics against gnostic teaching that his followers carry out in his name. For, they argue, he is a derivative, merely instrumental power, whom the divine Mother had created to administer the universe. Yet he himself remained ignorant of the power of Wisdom, his own Mother.

> *They say that the creator believed that he created everything by himself, but that, in reality, he had made them because his Mother, Wisdom, infused him with energy, and had given him*

her ideas. But he was unaware that the ideas he used came from her; He was even ignorant of his own Mother.[25]

Followers of Valentinus suggest that his Mother herself encouraged him to think that he was acting autonomously in creating the world; but, one teacher adds, "It was because he was foolish and ignorant of his Mother that he said, 'I am God; there is none beside me.'"[26]

Others attribute to him a more sinister motive: jealousy. According to the *Secret Book of John*,

he said.. "I am a jealous God, and there is no other God but me." But uttering this he indicated to the angels...that there was another God. For if there were no other, of whom could he be jealous? Then the Mother began to be distressed...[27]

A third gnostic teacher describes the Lord's shock, terror, and anxiety "when he discovered that he was not the God of the universe." Gradually his shock and fear gave way to wonder, and finally he came to welcome the teaching about Wisdom: "This is the meaning of the saying, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'"[28]

All of these are, of course, mythical explanations. Are there any clues to the actual, historical reasons that these gnostic writings were suppressed? This question is an extremely difficult one, for it raises a much larger issue: the question of how (i.e., by what means and what criteria) certain ideas, including those expressed in the texts cited above, came to be classified as heretical and others as orthodox by the beginning of the third century. Since the research is still in its early stages, this question is far from solved.

Yet we may find one clue if we ask: are there any practical consequences that orthodox Christians derive from their exclusively masculine and authoritarian conception of God? I would suggest that the answer is *yes*. Early Christian sources clearly indicate what the traditional conception of God implies for social and political practice. These implications did not escape the apostle Paul: he argues from his conception of God that the authority of men over women is nothing less than divinely ordained. Paul explains that as God has authority over Christ, so the man has authority over the woman. For what reason? To answer this, Paul cites the creation story of Genesis 2, which describes how Adam, the male, was made first, and then Eve emerged from his body, created "to be a helper appropriate for him" (Genesis 2.20). (Note

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that this story strikingly reverses the actual birth process by transferring the power of giving birth from the female to the male.) From this account, Paul concludes that

> *The man is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man; and besides, the man was not created for the woman's sake, but the woman for the sake of the man.*[28]

So, Paul concludes, it is the same Lord God who created Adam first who authorizes the social pattern of male domination.

Only two generations later, other Christians extend this social pattern into an argument for the political structure of Christian communities. The majority of Christian communities, following the lead of the church in Rome, adopted as canonical the pseudo-Pauline letter of Timothy, which offers the following extreme interpretation of Paul's views:

> *Let a woman learn in silence with full submissiveness. I do not allow any woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; she is to remain silent, for [note Genesis 2!] Adam was formed first, and then Eve; and besides, Adam was not deceived, but the woman was utterly seduced and came into sin...*[29]

The political structure that emerged from this first and second century orthodox tradition claimed—as one might expect—to have the authority of God, that familiar figure of the Lord, King, Father, Ruler, and Judge. It is clearly no coincidence that the orthodox insist that he could be represented only by men. Furthermore, this occurs at the very time (c.140-200 A.D.) when certain churches are beginning to develop a hierarchical structure of organization. At the head of this hierarchy stands the bishop, described in orthodox sources as God's representative: now the bishop is called Lord, King, Father, Ruler and Judge on earth "in God's place." Below him stand the priests—all men, of course—and, third, the deacons, a third "order" in this hierarchy, which is, by this time, limited exclusively to men. Our sources suggest, then, a striking correlation between the exclusively masculine image of God, the social structure of male domination, and the political structure of the community.

What about the gnostics who describe God in both masculine and feminine terms, as a dyadic entity? Does the introduction of feminine symbolism for God bear any direct implications for the understanding of social and political relationships between men

and women? Here again, the answer is *yes*. When gnostic teachers recount human creation, they usually choose to refer not to Genesis 2 but to the creation account of Genesis 1.26ff. ("and God said, let us make mankind in our image, after our image and likeness...in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.") Rabbis in Talmudic times (perhaps influenced by the story in Plato's *Symposium*) had suggested that Genesis 1.26-27 narrates an androgynous creation. Rabbi Samuel Nachman explained from this passage that

> *when the Holy One...first created mankind, he created him with two sets of genitals, four arms and legs, back to back; then he split Adam in two, and made two backs, one on each side.*[31]

Certain gnostic teachers took the suggestion of an androgynous Adam even farther. The gnostic Marcus concludes from Genesis 1 not only that "humankind, which was formed in the image and likeness of God, was masculofeminine, but also that the God in whose image we are made must also be dyadic.[32] Another teacher explains that the Father is speaking to God the Mother when he says "Let *us* make humankind." A third teacher says that since God is a "bisexual Power, what comes into being from that power, that is, humanity, being one, is discovered to be two...a bisexual entity."[33]

Do the gnostics draw social and political consequences from their theory that human nature consists of two equal elements, male and female? How could equality between men and women be enacted as a political principle in Christian communities (especially when these groups meet as enclaves in societies primarily ruled by men)? The question is a difficult one; we have little evidence of gnostic practice. Nevertheless, one orthodox bishop, Irenaeus, does tell us how one group of gnostics, the group led by Marcus, solved this problem. Irenaeus says that "whenever these gnostics gather together, they always draw lots."[34] Whoever draws a certain lot thereby is designated as the speaker for that meeting. Another member, also chosen by lot, is designated as reader of that day's scripture; a third is bishop; others draw lots to serve as the priests who administer the ritual worship. This does not mean that these matters are left to chance: on the contrary, the members believe that they are left to God, whose spirit guides the way the lots will fall.

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You can see immediately what this means in practice. The community cannot divide along sexual lines, nor between hierarchical orders of "clergy" or "laity." Being a *priest* or *bishop* is not, for the gnostic, a "position" or an "office"; instead, it is a function, a role, that any member, man or woman, slave or slaveowner, Jew or Gentile, may assume as the lots are cast. What happens when the meeting ends? No one "is" a bishop; no one "is" a priest. Instead, one member has served *as* bishop for that session; others have served as priests, as speaker and so on. But when they reassemble they will draw lots *again*, and others will take on these tasks.

Irenaeus, an orthodox bishop, notes with dismay the results of this practice: he complains that women in particular are attracted to this heretical circle. Marcus' group offers prayers to the Mother in her aspects as Silence, Grace, and Wisdom, women priests serve the eucharist together with men; and women also speak as prophets, uttering to the whole community what "the Spirit" reveals to them. The orthodox bishop says that "by means of such words and practices these teachers have led astray many women, even in our own district [the Rhone valley]!"[35] Professing himself to be at a loss to understand the attraction this group holds he offers only one explanation: that Marcus himself is a diabolically successful seducer, a magician who compounds special aphrodisiacs to "deceive, victimize, and defile" these "many foolish women!" Whether his accusation has any factual basis is difficult, probably impossible, to ascertain. Nevertheless the historian notes that accusations of sexual license are a stock-in-trade of polemical arguments; and that the bishop professes to be scandalized by the licentiousness of a mystical ritual, in which the participant becomes "joined" and "united" to the Savior.[36] Certainly Irenaeus refuses to admit the possibility that the group might attract Christians—especially women—for sound and comprehensible reasons.

Tertullian, another "father of the church," attacks a heretical group led by "that viper"—a woman teacher who led a congregation in North Africa.[37] Tertullian denounces another group for sending a woman evangelist as its first representative to Rome.[38] Tertullian expresses his outrage at the behavior of

> *these heretical women—how audacious they are! They have no modesty: they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argu-*

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ment, to enact exorcisms, to undertake healings, and, it may be, even to baptize

which would mean that they are bishops as well! Tertullian is quite aware of the egalitarianism of the gnostic groups which provoke his special wrath:

> *How frivolous, how worldly, how merely human it is, without seriousness, without any discipline, without authority! No one cares who is a newcomer, or who is a priest, or even a woman: they all have access equally; they all listen equally; they all pray equally...All of them are arrogant; all offer you knowledge.*[39]

Tertullian takes this as clear evidence for the breakdown of authority—the male authority, sanctioned by God, as Tertullian understands Him.

Another "heretic," Marcion, had, in fact, scandalized his "orthodox" contemporaries by appointing women on an equal basis with men as priests and bishops among his congregations. The teacher Marcillina also travelled to Rome to represent the Carpocratian group, an esoteric circle that claimed to have received secret teaching from Mary, Salome, and Martha.[40] Among the Montanists, a radical prophetic circle, the prophet Philumene was reported to have hired a male secretary to transcribe her inspired oracles.[41]

Other secret texts, such as the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and the *Wisdom of Faith*, suggest that the activity of such women leaders was challenged by the orthodox communities who regarded Peter as their spokesman. The *Gospel of Mary* relates that Mary offered to encourage the disciples after the crucifixion by telling them what the Lord had told her privately, when they were alone together. Peter, furious at the suggestion, asks, "Did he then talk secretly with a woman, instead of to us? Are we to go and learn from *her* now? Did he love her more than us?" Mary, distressed at his rage, asks Peter, "What do you think? Do you think I made this up in my heart? Do you think I am lying about the Lord?" Levi breaks in at this point to mediate the dispute: "Peter, you are always irascible. You object to the woman as our enemies do. Surely the Lord knew her very well, and indeed, he loved her more than us..." Then he and the others invite Mary to teach them what she knows.[42] Another argument between Peter and Mary occurs in *Wisdom of Faith*. Peter complains that Mary is dominating the

conversation, even to the point of displacing the rightful priority of Peter himself and his brethren; he asks Jesus to silence her—a request that earns him a quick rebuke. Later, however, Mary admits to Jesus that she hardly dares to speak freely with him, because "Peter makes me hesitate: I am afraid of him, because he hates the female race." Jesus replies then that whoever receives inspiration from the Spirit is divinely ordained to speak, whether man or woman.[43]

Among a wide range of gnostic groups, then, women are revered as prophets, act as teachers, travelling evangelists, healers, priests, and even bishops. The evidence suggests that in some of these groups they played leading roles from which they were *excluded* in the orthodox churches, at least by 150-200 A.D.

One might be tempted to conclude that these gnostic groups, together with their conception of God and human nature, were suppressed *only* because of their positive attitude toward women. But such an assumption would be a mistake—a hasty and simplistic reading of the evidence. In the first place, the development of orthodox Christian doctrine is far from wholly negative in its attitude toward women. A polemically feminist reading of that history is bound to be extremely one-sided. Secondly, many *other* elements of the gnostic sources diverge in fundamental ways from what came to be accepted as orthodox Christian teaching. To examine this process in detail would require a much more extensive discussion than is possible here. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that two very different patterns of sexual attitudes emerged in orthodox and gnostic circles.

In simplest form, gnostic theologians correlate their description of God in both masculine and feminine terms with a complementary description of human nature. Most often they refer to the creation account of Genesis 1, which suggests an equal (or even androgynous) creation of mankind. This conception carries the principle of equality between men and women into the practical social and political structures of gnostic communities. But the othodox pattern is strikingly different. Orthodox theologians, who describe God in exclusively masculine terms, often go on to describe from Genesis 2 how Adam, understood as male, was created first, and Eve only later, from Adam, and for his fulfillment. We have seen how this view, like the gnostic one,

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translates into social and political practice: by the late second century, orthodox Chrstians came to accept the domination of men over women as the proper, God-given order—not only for the human race, but also for the Christian churches.

A remarkable exception to this pattern occurs in the writings of one revered "father of the church," Clement of Alexandria. Clement identifies himself as orthodox, although he knows members of gnostic groups and their writings well; some scholars suggest that he was himself a gnostic initiate. Yet his writings demonstrate how all three elements of what we have called the "gnostic pattern" could be worked into fully "orthodox" teaching. First, Clement can describe God not only in masculine but also in feminine terms. In one rather startling passage he writes,

> *Christ alone feeds us with the milk of the Father, supplying us children with the milk of his maternal love. For the Word is everything to us, both father and mother; and we are truly happy who suck at his breasts.*[44]

Second, when we investigate how Clement describes human nature, we may not be surprised to find him insist that "men and women share equally in perfection, and are to receive the same instruction and discipline. For the name 'humanity' is common to both men and women; and for us 'in Christ there is neither male nor female.'"[45] What about the third element—the active participation of women with men in the Christian community? It is remarkable, but clearly no accident, that Clement offers a list—unique in orthodox tradition—of women whose achievements he admires. They range from ancient examples, like Judith, the assassin who destroyed Israel's enemy, to Queen Esther, who rescued her people from genocide, as well as others who took radical political stands. He goes on to speak of Themisto, the Epicurean philosopher, and Arignole, the historian; he names many other women philosophers including two who studied with Plato and one trained by Socrates. At one point he breaks out in praise:

> *What shall I say? Did not Theano the Pythagoran make such progress in philosophy that when a man, staring at her, said, "Your arm is beautiful," she replied, "Yes, but it is not on public display."*[46]

Clement concludes his list with famous women poets, philosophers, and painters. The work of Clement, then, who taught in Egypt

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before the lines of orthodoxy and heresy were rigidly drawn (c. 160-180 A.D.), demonstrates how the principle of human equality could be incorporated even into orthodox Christian teaching.

Nevertheless, the majority of communities in the west, led by the Roman community, succeeded in excluding feminine symbolism from the description of God; in defining humanity in predominantly masculine language; and in establishing the socio-political domination of a hierarchy of male bishops, priests, and deacons, over women, and, in fact, over the great majority of all Christian believers.

How are we to account for this? The question deserves investigation which this discussion can only initiate. For example, one would need to consider how (and for what reasons) the zealously patriarchical traditions of Israel were adopted by the Roman (and other) Christian communities, and with what results. Such research might disclose how social and cultural forces converged to suppress feminine symbolism and women's participation from much of western Christian tradition. Given such research, the history of religion in the West could never be told in the same way again.

NOTES

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1. Where the God of Israel is characterized as husband and lover in the Old Testament, his spouse is described as the community of Israel (i.e., Isaiah 50.1; 54.1-8; Jeremiah 2.2-3; 20-25; 3.1-20; Hosea 1-4, 14) or as the land of Israel (cf. Is. 62.1-5).
2. One may note several exceptions to this rule: Deuteronomy 32.11; Hos. 11.1; Is. 66.12 ff.; Numbers 11.12.
3. *L'Evangile Selon Thomas* (hereafter cited as ET), A. Guillaumont, H. Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till, Yassah 'Abd-al-Masih, eds. (Paris, 1959), Log. 113-114.
4. Hippolytus, *Refutationis Omnium Haeresium* (hereafter cited as *Ref*), L. Dunker, F. Schneidewin, eds. (Gottingen, 1859), 5.7.
5. *Ref* 5.6.
6. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* (hereafter cited as AH), W. H. Harvey, ed. (Cambridge, 1857), 1. 11.1.
7. AH 1.13.2.
8. AH 1.13.6.
9. AH 1.18.2.
10. AH 1.11.5-21.1.3; *Ref* 6.29.
11. *Apocryphon Johannis* (hereafter cited as AJ), S. Giversen, ed. (Copenhagen, 1963), 47.20-48.14.
12. AJ 52.34-53.6.
13. AJ 61.13-14.
14. Origen, *Commentary on John*, 2.12; *Homily on Jeremiah*, 15.4.
15. ET 101. The text of this passage is badly damaged; I follow here the reconstruction of Prof. G. MacRae of the Harvard Divinity School.
16. *L'Evangile Selon Phillipe* (hereafter cited as EP), J. E. Menard, ed. (Paris, 1967), Log. 6.
17. EP, Log. 36.
18. EP, Log. 82.
19. EP, Log. 17.
20. *Extraits de Théodote*, F. Sagnard, ed., *Sources Chrétiennes* 23 (Paris, 1948).

21. AH 1.30.6.
22. *Ref* 6.17.
23. *Ref* 6.14.
24. AH 1.14.7-8.
25. *REF* 6.33.
26. AH 1.5.4; *Ref* 6.33.
27. AJ 61.8-14.
28. *Ref* 7.26.
29. 1 Corinthians 11.7-9.
30. 2 Timothy 2.11-14.
31. Genesis Rabba 8.1, cf. 17.6. Cf. also Leviticus Rabba 14. For an excellent discussion of androgyny, see W. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13:3 (1974), 165-208.
32. AH 1.18.2.
33. *Ref* 6.18.
34. AH 1.14.1-6.
35. AH 1.13.2-5.
36. AH 1.13.2-5.
37. *De Baptismo* (hereafter cited as DB) 1. I am grateful to Cyril Richardson for calling my attention to this passage and to the three subsequent ones.
38. DB 42.5.
39. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Hereticorum* (hereafter cited as DP), 41.
40. AH 1.25.6.
41. DP 6.30.
42. *The Gospel According to Mary*, BG 8502, 1.7.1-19.5; G. Macrae, ed., introd., and transl., unpublished manuscript.
43. *Pistis Sophia*, Carl Schmidt, ed. (Leipzig, 1925), 36 (57), 71 (161).
44. Clement Alexandrinus, *Paidagogos* (hereafter cited as *Paid.*), O. Stahlin, ed. (Leipzig, 1905), I.6.
45. *Paid.* I.4.
46. *Paid.* I.19.

In the afternoon session of The Scholar and The Feminist III, the following seminars were presented (for further information, please contact the seminar leaders):

1. The Female Threat: Patriarchal Ideology in the *Odyssey*
   Mary R. Lefkowitz, Wellesley College
   Joan Peters, The City College, CUNY
2. Jung After Feminism: A Perspective from the Psychology of Religion
   Naomi Goldenberg, Yale University
3. The Politics of Wagelessness: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due
   Silvia Federici, New York Wages for Housework Committee
4. Anger As Inspiration and Inhibition: American Women Writers, 1850 to the Present
   Ann Douglas, Columbia University
5. Origins of Women as Sex-Objects in the Visual Arts
   Nanette Salomon, Queens College, CUNY, and Fordham University
6. The Development of Sex Differences as the Development of Power Differences
   Rhoda K. Unger, Montclair State College
7. The Origins of Modern Marriage
   Heidi Hartmann, The New School for Social Research
   Ellen Ross, Connecticut College
8. Beyond the Mother Tongue: Repression and Expression of Sensuous Experience in Women's Poetic Language
   Barbara S. Miller, Barnard College
   Agueda Pizzaro, Brooklyn College, CUNY
9. "Biological" Origins: Avoiding the Mire of "Genetic Destiny"
   Ethel Tobach, American Museum of Natural History
10. The Medieval Church: What Happened to Women?
    Suzanne F. Wemple, Barnard College
11. The Physical Abuse of Women: The Force of Patriarchy
    Nadia Telsey, York College, CUNY
12. The Perspective of the Black Woman Writer in American Literature
    Joan Hazzard, The City College, CUNY
13. Origins and Aims of Socialist Feminism
    Barbara Ehrenreich
    Elizabeth Ewen, Old Westbury, SUNY